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The Ensuing Mirage

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Everything that happened to my life was so unexpected and accidental. I didn't expect such a situation in my life. I wanted to be always with the company of my family and friends, but now I am alone to face all the controversies in my life. All are going away from me...I am sure that it was not my fault. Then who is the villain of my life?

“Smitha, where were you? I was always looking for you..... Please stay there.... Why are you so indifferent? Don't you understand me? I am.... Arun- your boyfriend.”

Someone was yelling behind me, when I was walking along with Sooraj, my husband, through the *nadappandal* of the Guruvayur temple, two years ago. I didn't look back to the man, because simply I was not Smitha. I am Veena. I thought this man must have found his girlfriend after a long period of time.

As every day, Guruvayur temple was crowded that day too. Many people are in their procession around the sanctum of Lord Krishna, Guruvayoorappan, by chanting prayers. Suddenly, someone poked me by asking, “Do you know me?” I looked back. A young man was standing just behind me. Though he was handsome, he looked very much disappointed, with unshaven cheeks and uncombed hair.

I couldn't get who this man is? He may be one of my students. I have started my teaching career as a college lecturer soon after completing my Post Graduation. So I had students who were of my same age. Some were elder to me. I couldn't remember all of their faces especially boys. Their faces may have changed a lot by growing beard and moustache.

Sooraj looked at me with a kind of interrogation. I smiled at Arun and answered. “Sorry... I didn't get you...I think you are my student.” The man's face changed. His eyes winced and blood rushed to his face. “Smitha... Don't play with me... how can you do this to

me? I am Varun. Who is this man?" He asked by pointing Sooraj. "We were in love dear... can't you remember? ...while we were in SN College." He was going on.

Sooraj got angry as he always. He looked at me with sparkling eyes. I wanted to do something instead of staring being shocked. "Sorry. You are mistaken. I am not Smitha. I am Veena. I haven't studied at any SN college." I started walking thinking that the man was crazy.

"No... you are lying.... I know you are Smitha." He said this a little bit loudly. People gathered around us and enquired about the problem. I walked fast. I wanted to be moved away from the temple premise. Sooraj was trying to explain what has happened to the crowd. I was embarrassed. May be he was lying. Anyway a kind of happiness peeped out of the corner of my mind. At least I had a boy friend. I didn't have any one while I was studying. I used to imagine of having a boyfriend.

The man fished out his girl friend's photo from his wallet, a girl in red and white churidar, and to my great bewilderment that girl was exactly like me. I looked sooraj panicky. What I have to say.

"Smitha, I have gone abroad to make money for our marriage and after one year, I was told that you have passed away." Have you forgotten everything that happened three years back? Suddenly my heart lightened.

"What? When did you meet smitha?"

"You know five years back when we were studying at SN College Coimbathore for Mechanical engineering." I breathed with repose.

"Hey, Varun, I have told you ...I am not your Smitha." I said him calmly. You are mistaken. I haven't studied at SN College or I am not an engineer. I am a lecturer in English. Moreover I was married to Sooraj nine years back."

Sooraj was also a little bit relaxed at this time. Varun stared at me with confusion.

"I walked towards the parking area. What is the matter? Do you know him?" Sooraj insisted. I got irritated.

“How can I know a mad man? You know my name and you know where I was studied. Then how do I know such a person?” I was fumed with rage. Even my husband was not at all ready to accept the whole.

We started to regress from Guruvayur to our home. While driving, he didn't say anything. It was his nature. If he was annoyed by anything he wouldn't speak. He could not control his rage. He used to shout at me for each and everything that I asked.

We visited the Guruvayur temple after nine years. Last time we came here soon after our marriage. Nine years had passed since our marriage, though it bloomed never. When we started our journey, Sooraj was so happy. For this reason, I thought that everything would be OK after this pilgrimage. Everything seemed so complicated at that point of time. I didn't know how to solve all these. Tears rolled over my cheek. I thought why this happened to me. All my enjoyments soon ended up in such discontented situations.

The second incident happened a few months later. It was at my college.

“O my God! I can't believe.... Rekha?” Prof. Syam asked in incredulity when he saw me for the first time. He was around forty five and recently transferred to our college.

“Sorry sir, I am Veena, lecturer in English.” I replied with a kind of hesitation. My heart beat at my mouth. “May I know who is Rekha?”

“Sorry. Rekha was my wife. She is no more now. She passed away two years ago. She was under cancer treatment for the last five years.” He murmured. “Sorry madam you are looking exactly as Rekha. When I saw you unexpectedly my mind has gone to somewhere...Forgive me.”

I couldn't move. My heart weighed around 100 kg.

“What will you do after my death?” That night, I just asked Sooraj. “Won't you find a girl who is similar me and marry her?”

“Let's see it after your death.” He was not in a mood to answer. Anyway I thought about the uncertainty of death. “What will happen to people after death? Where do they go? Is there a new

life after death? Where do the thoughts and feelings of people go?" My mind was undulating over these thoughts.

Today, someone has died in our family. But I couldn't understand who it is. I am almost in a numbly mood. Along with my family members- Sooraj, father, mother, and sisters, their husbands and children- I am standing at the sands of *Thiunavaya*, where the posthumous rituals are doing. I attempt to talk to everyone. But no one seemed to care for me. I have asked several times to my mother who has died. She is not even noticing me. Tears are running out of her eyes. So I choose to keep quiet.

Sooraj's eyes are also overflowing. May be his father has died. His mother has already died. But what happened to me, I am not even conscious on the death of my own father- in- law. He was always so good to me. I start weeping. But everyone is busy with their own affairs- my sisters and Sooraj are walking towards the river to plunge themselves in the river. All others are standing and watching them with wet eyes. On their return, the priest has arranged the things for oblation.

Sooraj sits on the sand in wet dhoti. Water is oozing from his hairs, as he hasn't swabbed his head, to the piece of plaintain leaf, where the rice and sesame seeds are placed for the ritual. The urn which contains the ash of the body keeps at one end of the leaf. I prayed for the defunct. The priest asks Sooraj to pray first. I can see him crying.

"Think about the defunct. What is her name?" the priest asked.

"Veena." Sooraj utters amidst of his tears.

"It was an accident. "Someone murmured.

Yes. I do remember. I was traveling with Sooraj. Suddenly something hit powerfully at the back of our bike. I can't remember anything after that.

The earth has cracked under my feet. So..... So.... am I dead? My family is weeping on my death. I can't live as my parent's daughter and as Sooraj's wife anymore in this beautiful world. My world is poles apart from them now. I can't bear this concept. No....I won't go..... I cried out.

“Take this urn and recollect your wife and plunge it into the river.” The priest directs as Sooraj is standing in water. I halt helplessly watching Sooraj drifting me away in the running water. He plunges himself thrise in the water.

Now I am not earthly. This is not my world... I stare at my kin who are walking away from my sight. I can't move... my feet are buried in the sand... I am being depleted in the flowing water.

Unexpectedly, Sooraj stopped for a while. A lady is passing through his side. He seems frantic. With great embarrassment, he asked her,

“Hey, Veena.... please stop there.”